11-6-76

Dear Mr. Weisberg:

Thanks for your response to my letter concerning the book on Penn Jones. Let me try to clarify a couple of items here.

The quote of yours that I would like to use as one of the book's epigraphs ("Above all, the Report leaves in jeopardy the rights of all Americans and the honor of the nation") comes from Whitewash: The Report on the Warren Report (the oversized pb. edition of your own ~~publication~~ publishing), p. 189. // no. Dell

I of course want to respect your feelings about the use of private correspondence.

The long quote about Penn's "paranoia" (see enclosed, from page proofs) was taken from the two-page letter you wrote to me in June of 1973. It was my understanding that you realized I was writing to you in reference to my plans to do a lengthy article or book on Penn. As I recall, I wrote back to thank you for your valuable comments, again indicating that I hoped to use some of them.

Your note on Ted Kennedy was sent in 1972, when I was in the process of preparing a presentation on the assassination question in New Bern, N. C. At that point I admittedly had no plans for a book of any kind on the assassination. I have also enclosed the Kennedy quote, in context, for your consideration.

I very much hope you will grant me permission to use both quotes from your letters. Both are organically important to the theses of the book. Both are honest and relevant opinions.

Thank you again for your consideration and time.

Sincerely,

H. C. Nash

209 N. 7th St.
Morehead City, NC 28557

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I think then that we must be impassioned.
This does not exclude common sense or wisdom.

--Saint-Just, from a notebook entry by Camus

Many moderate and even "liberal" political observers — like Terry Kelly — have been put off by Penn Jones's style. A trained journalist, it must be said, will find much in the four volumes of *Forgive My Grief* that is poorly organized, carelessly written, and wildly, bitterly speculative. Many articles leave the reader asking obvious questions — if not about details of the subject, then about sources, documentation, and substantiation. Jones often writes as if his own formidable knowledge of the massive detail of assassination materials is shared by everyone who reads him. Writing as something of a geographic "insider" (in *FMG I* he speaks of collaborating with other critics "from near the scene to contribute as much as possible"), he is perhaps tempted to rely too much on his intuitive feeling for the atmosphere of the Dallas setting and too little on verifiable supporting material.

One of Penn's severest critics is Harold Weisberg, author of the *Whitewash* series and himself one of the most dogged and individualistic of the assassinologists. A former newspaper and magazine writer, Senate investigator, and intelligence expert, Weisberg evidently sees the bulk of Penn's work as amateurish, counterproductive, and worse. Although in *Oswald in New Orleans* he speaks with respect of the editor (calling Penn and his wife "two of the bravest people I have ever met"), he has corresponded as follows:

> Penn has become paranoid. He sees conspiracy in fleecy clouds. Everyone who thinks other than he does is some kind of federal agent. I have had this experience, as I have with his paranoia. The net result of his many excesses is that our credibility is gone wherever his garbage is seen by opinion-influencers and, had some of the projects of which he was part succeeded, we'd be worse off than we are.
>
> The thing for which he is best known, the mysterious deaths, is an example . . .Can all of these deaths be sinister? I stopped telling him of those of which I learned because he became so irrational and extreme. He has taken a legitimate question and made reasonable and rational examination of it an impossibility for those who control what people read and think.
>
> . . .his "investigations" are nightmares and generally non-existent. One trip to Dallas I took him around with me. The number of

[close up

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people he hadn't spoken to was astounding. I found no single one unwilling to talk to me and, although a total stranger, had no trouble finding those Penn and others couldn't. And didn't. Moreover, I don't know of anything he has done that can be called an investigation, not honestly.

Those of you who have ideas of your own to begin with and lack the knowledge for any dispassionate assessment were taken by the attention he has gotten, which was never warranted by anything he did in this field.[1]

* * * * *

Even an admirer of the essence of Penn Jones's work will have to admit that in the man's outrage versus this ugly matter he often makes inflammatory judgments that are, while perhaps circumstantially plausible, very difficult to prove. Logic is sometimes swept away in the same full flood of indignation. Take the case of John Connally's alleged involvement in the assassination conspiracy.

Jones links the ex-governor with the assassination on the general grounds of his long-term connections with Lyndon Johnson and big-money oil and investment interests of the Southwest (Connally is still the "executive officer" of the Sid Richardson empire, Penn has written), and point is also made of Connally's general opposition to the liberal wing of the Democratic Party in Texas, the political camp that most strongly supported JFK and former Senator Ralph Yarborough.

"I believe Connally was the 'cut-out man' between the conspirators and the men at the operating level," says Jones. He uses Connally's [illegible] upon being wounded: "My [illegible] to kill us all," with editorial emphasis on the "they." This is taken to represent vindication for the theory that there was more than one assassin, that there was a conspiracy, and that Connally so signaled this information in a moment of stress and pain and surprise.

Certainly this is dubious stuff. It represents the kind of sloppiness that mars many of the articles published in the four volumes of *Forgive My Grief*. When confronted with this criticism, however, Jones relents not an inch: in fact he contends (and he has written to this effect) that Connally was virtually "insane" for a year or more following the assassination, largely as a result of the shocked realization that his co-conspirators would show so little regard for his well-being. In *FMG III* Jones even offers a bit of imaginative dialogue that has an anonymous colleague among the executive-level conspirators reassuring Connally thus: "No, we did not intend to shoot you. It was an accident. I tell you, it was an accident."

There are further examples of careless method and/or faulty logic. Here are some:

1. In spite of his work with The Committee to Investigate Assassinations, Bernard Fensterwald is suspect because he has been associated with Roy Cohn (Senator Joseph McCarthy's young counsel during the "Army hearings" of the early

of his own well-being, from seeking or accepting the Democratic nomination for President in 1976. This is all well and good, but such expressions of concern for Kennedy's safety raise other, deeper questions. Does Senator Mansfield, for example, merely share a widespread generalized fear for Kennedy's safety, or is his apprehension based on more explicit knowledge — knowledge that could be shared with the American people?

Whatever the answer to the foregoing question, most critics of the Warren Report would probably agree with the view of Harold Weisberg:

> Any Kennedy President would find his Presidency intolerable with a single unasked or unanswered question about John's assassination and its investigation. Here, I think, aside from the larger number of anti-Kennedy nuts in nutdom, is where hazard to Teddy lies.[2]

While teaching in a college-extension program in a small North Carolina community, I gave, in March of 1972, a questionnaire to more than a hundred students; the subject was the matter of Ted Kennedy's possible presidential candidacy in 1972. Some 60 percent of those polled indicated that they expected Kennedy to demur, and more than half of these indicated, without any multiple-choice alternatives for his motivation, that Kennedy would so demur because of his fear of physical harm. And these were young people (most of them from rural backgrounds) by no means cynical about the American "democratic" process — quite the contrary. Here, with original style intact, are some of their spontaneous responses in relation to the basic question:

> I really believe that Senator Kennedy has had his share of misfortunes.

> Because he has stated that he doesn't want to run and he might be a little afraid.

> I think he would be silly to run after all that has be said and done.

> Because of his brother were kill and he might get kill.

> ...and I think he might be afraid to follow in his brothers footsteps.

> Among other things, the family stigma...

> The family is gun shy; the only surviving Kennedy son left and I believe they wish to keep him...

> I think he has suffered enough.

students on the subject of Ted